STARBLAZER

FANTASY FICTION IN PICTURES No.229

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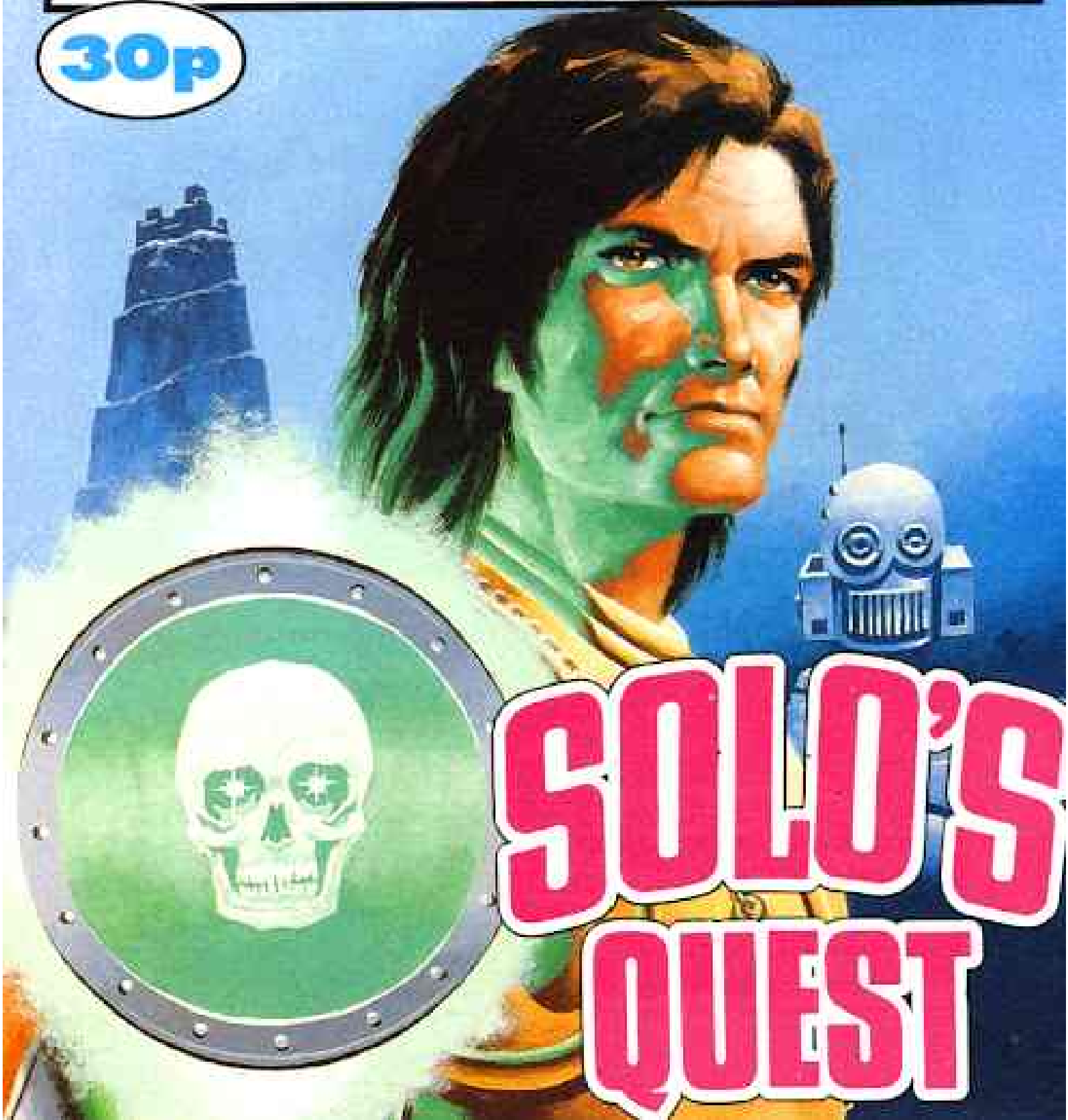
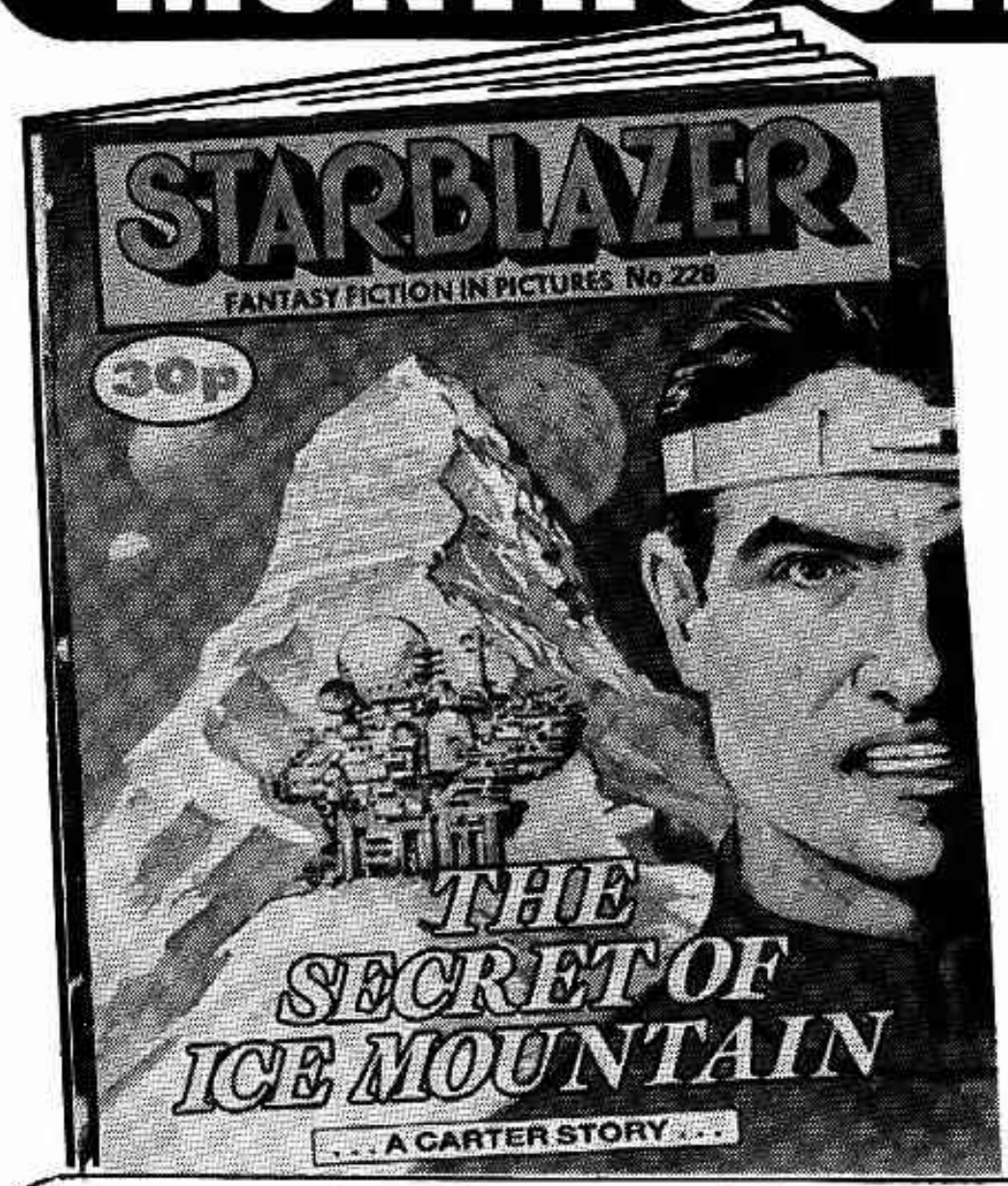


SOLO'S QUEST

DON'T FORGET THIS MONTH'S OTHER



NOW ON SALE

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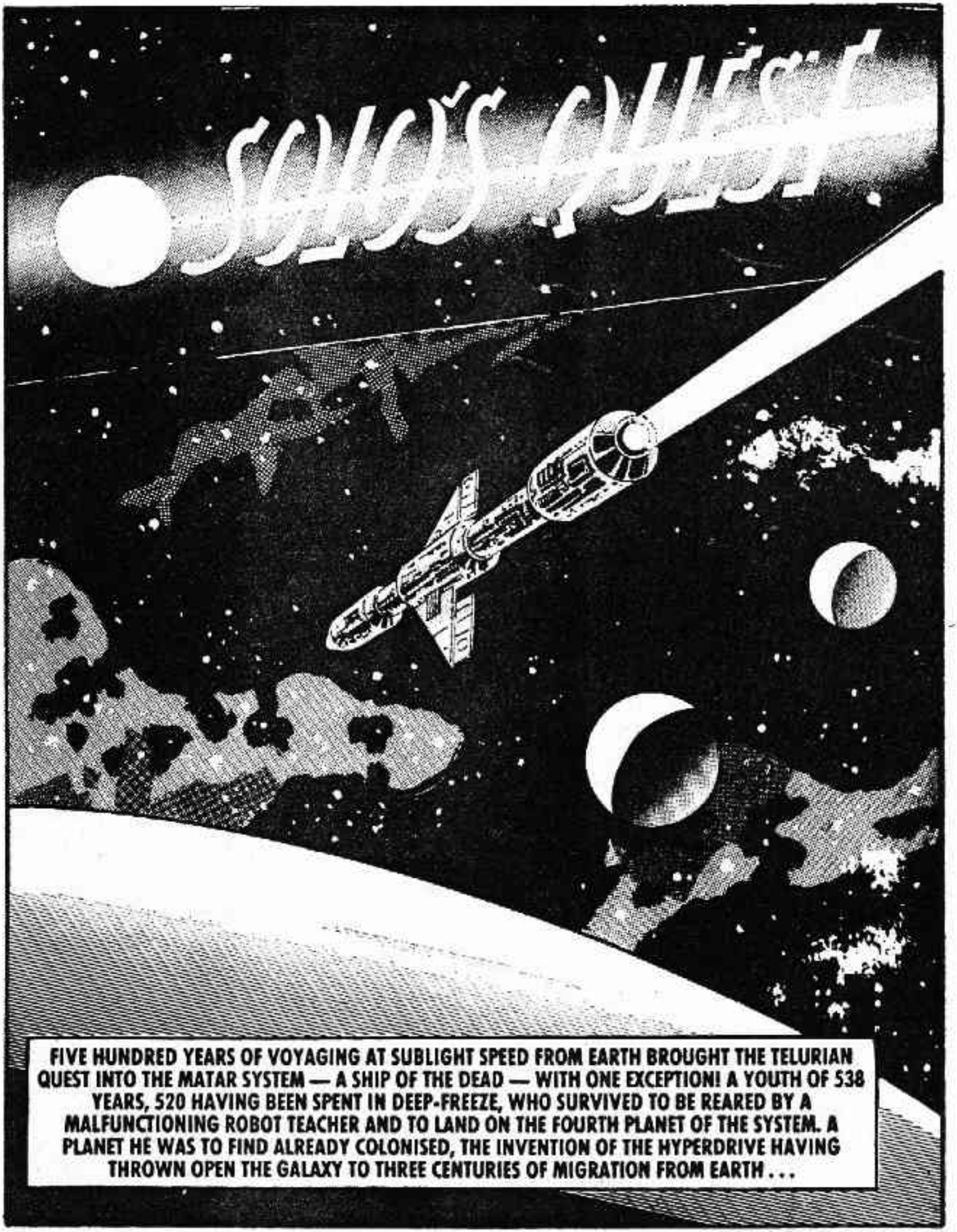
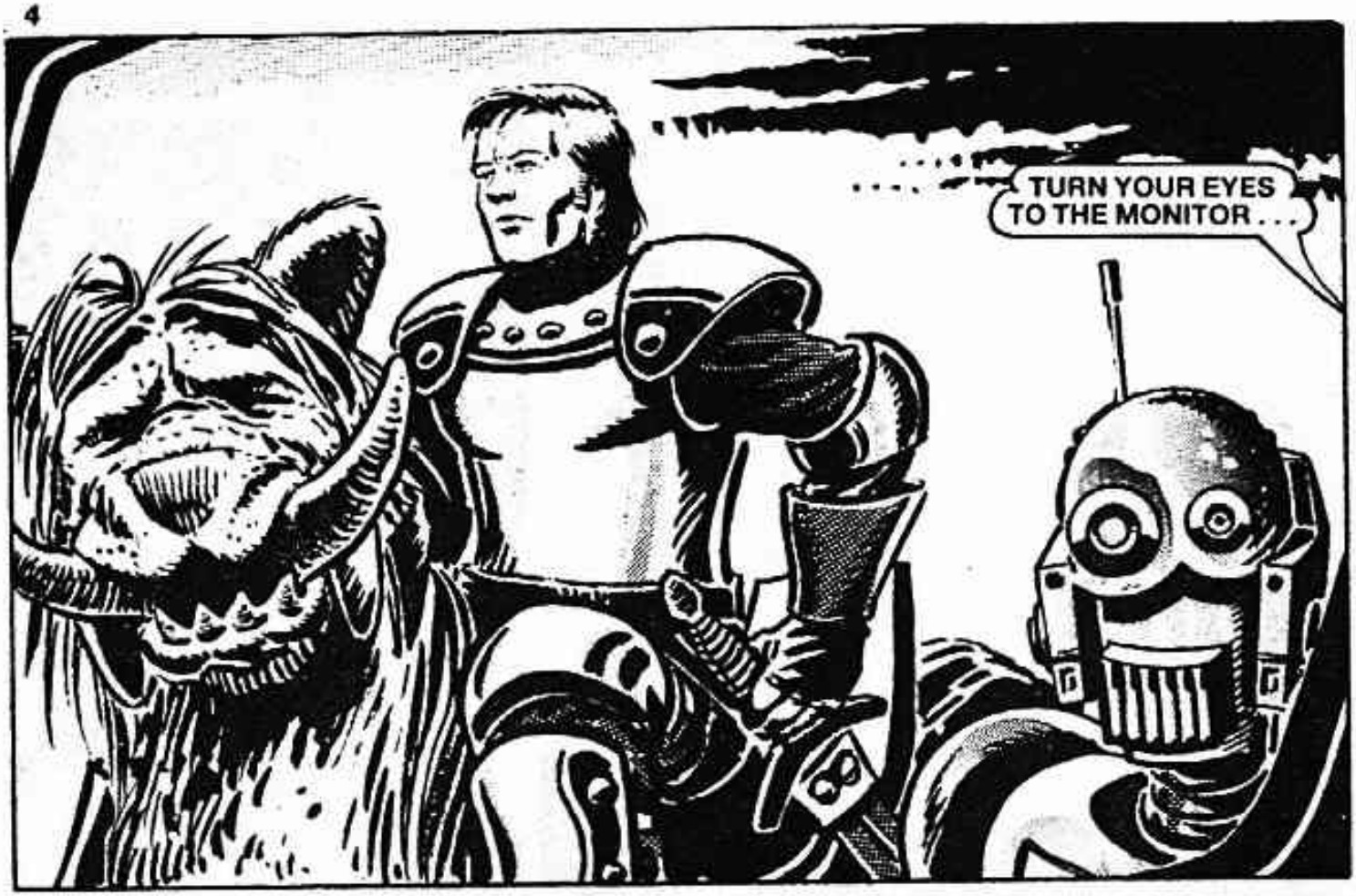

SOLO'S QUEST
FIVE HUNDRED YEARS OF VOYAGING AT SUBLIGHT SPEED FROM EARTH BROUGHT THE TELURIAN QUEST INTO THE MATAR SYSTEM — A SHIP OF THE DEAD — WITH ONE EXCEPTION! A YOUTH OF 538 YEARS, 520 HAVING BEEN SPENT IN DEEP-FREEZE, WHO SURVIVED TO BE REARED BY A MALFUNCTIONING ROBOT TEACHER AND TO LAND ON THE FOURTH PLANET OF THE SYSTEM. A PLANET HE WAS TO FIND ALREADY COLONISED, THE INVENTION OF THE HYPERDRIVE HAVING THROWN OPEN THE GALAXY TO THREE CENTURIES OF MIGRATION FROM EARTH . . .


TURN YOUR EYES TO THE MONITOR . . .

. . . AND THERE HE IS, ON A PLANET, GENTLEMEN, WHICH THE YOUTH WAS TO DISCOVER HE OWNED AS INHERITOR OF THE ORIGINAL CHARTER.

NOW I INTRODUCE ONE WHO WILL EXPLAIN THE REASON FOR THIS SPECIAL BOARD MEETING OF ZODIACAL ENTERPRISES — WIL CHIL, OUR RESIDENT AGENT ON MATAR-4.
THAT IS NOT POSSIBLE. THE GALACTIC POLICE ALLOW NO SUCH CONTACT WITH A PLANET DECLARED CLOSED AFTER THE THERMONUCLEAR WARS THAT WIPED OUT HALF ITS POPULATION TWO CENTURIES BACK.

PERHAPS I SHOULD BE LOOKED ON AS AN EXTREMELY PRIVATE AGENT, PLANTED BY THIS COMPANY AFTER A SECRET SURVEY DISCLOSED THE TREMENDOUS MINERAL WEALTH ON MATAR-4. THE PROBLEM IS HOW TO END THE CLOSURE OF A PLANET FAST SLIPPING INTO BARBARISM AND RULED BY A THOUSAND WARLORDS. NOW WE HAVE OUR ANSWER . . .

SOLO, AS HE CALLS HIMSELF, HAS A MISSION IN LIFE . . .

MEANWHILE, ON MATAR-4 . . .
HELP! PRITHEE, SIR KNIGHT — HELP ME!
AT LAST IT HAPPENS — A FAIR DAMSEL IN DISTRESS.
MORE LIKELY A FAST LITTLE NUMBER WHO HEARD YOU WERE COMING THIS WAY.

WHO IS THE FEMALE IN THE SOLO PARTY?
ILANA — SHE IS OF NO CONSEQUENCE — A MERE HANGER-ON — NOW WATCH WHAT FOLLOWS . . .

LADY, THIS HUMBLE KNIGHT COMES TO AID YOU.
THIS IS RIDICULOUS.

A BLACK KNIGHT! HE MUST BE LORD OF THE TOWER AND THE FAIR MAID HIS HELPLESS CAPTIVE.
UNDOUBTEDLY . . . *KLOK* . . . THOSE FRAGMENTS FROM THE VIDEO LIBRARY NARRATED MANY SUCH TERRIBLE — INSTANCES. —

HAVE-AT-THEE, FOUL CAIT — ER, WHAT IS THE WORD, DOC.
CAITIFF — A BASE PERSON, — THOUGH VARLET IS — ACCEPTABLE.
SOLO CLASHED WITH THE BLACK NIGHT—

JUST GIMMEE ONE CLEAR SHOT AT THE HEAP OF BLACK RUST.
NO — NEVER! FEMALE-PERSON, TO INTERFERE IN THIS AFFAIR OF HONOUR WILL BRING THE WRATH OF LORD SOLO UPON YOU.
WHY ALLOW SUCH DANGER TO ONE WHO COULD BE OF VALUE TO US?
BE ASSURED THE INCIDENT WAS CAREFULLY COMPUTED TO EXCLUDE ALL RISK TO THE YOUTH. OBSERVE!

TAKE THAT!
DOC, THIS BLACK KNIGHT WAS A MEKMAN LIKE YOURSELF.
A HANDSOME FELLOW.
SIRRAH, PRAY HELP ME.
NOW TO FREE THE DAMSEL.

FAIR MAID, I BRING YOU DELIVERANCE.
MY OWN BRAVE KNIGHT. HOW CAN I EVER REPAY YOU?

COME TO ME, FAIR SIR.
ODDSBLUD! SORCERY! A WITCH — I HAVE BEEN TRICKED.

AWAY, OLD BAT — ARGHHHH!
DESIST, EVIL HAG. GET YOU GONE.
A STRANGE FIGURE MATERIALISED.
YOU! YOU AGAIN! MUST YOU BE EVER MEDDLING IN MY SPORT?

CURSE YOU!
NAY, WEIRD SISTER, YOUR MAGIC IS TOO PUNY FOR ME.
SO BEGONE!

YOU PLAY THE MAGICIAN WELL, WIL CHIL.
A FEW SIMPLE TRICKS AND I AM ASSURED OF RESPECT IN A BACK-SLIDING SOCIETY WHERE SORCERY IS BEGINNING TO REPLACE SCIENCE.

GREAT WIZARD, I OWE YOU MY LIFE.
LORD SOLO, I AM YOUR FRIEND, BUT THERE ARE MANY WHO WISH YOU HARM. THIS AMULET HOLDS A LITTLE OF MY POWER AND WILL GIVE YOU A MEASURE OF PROTECTION.

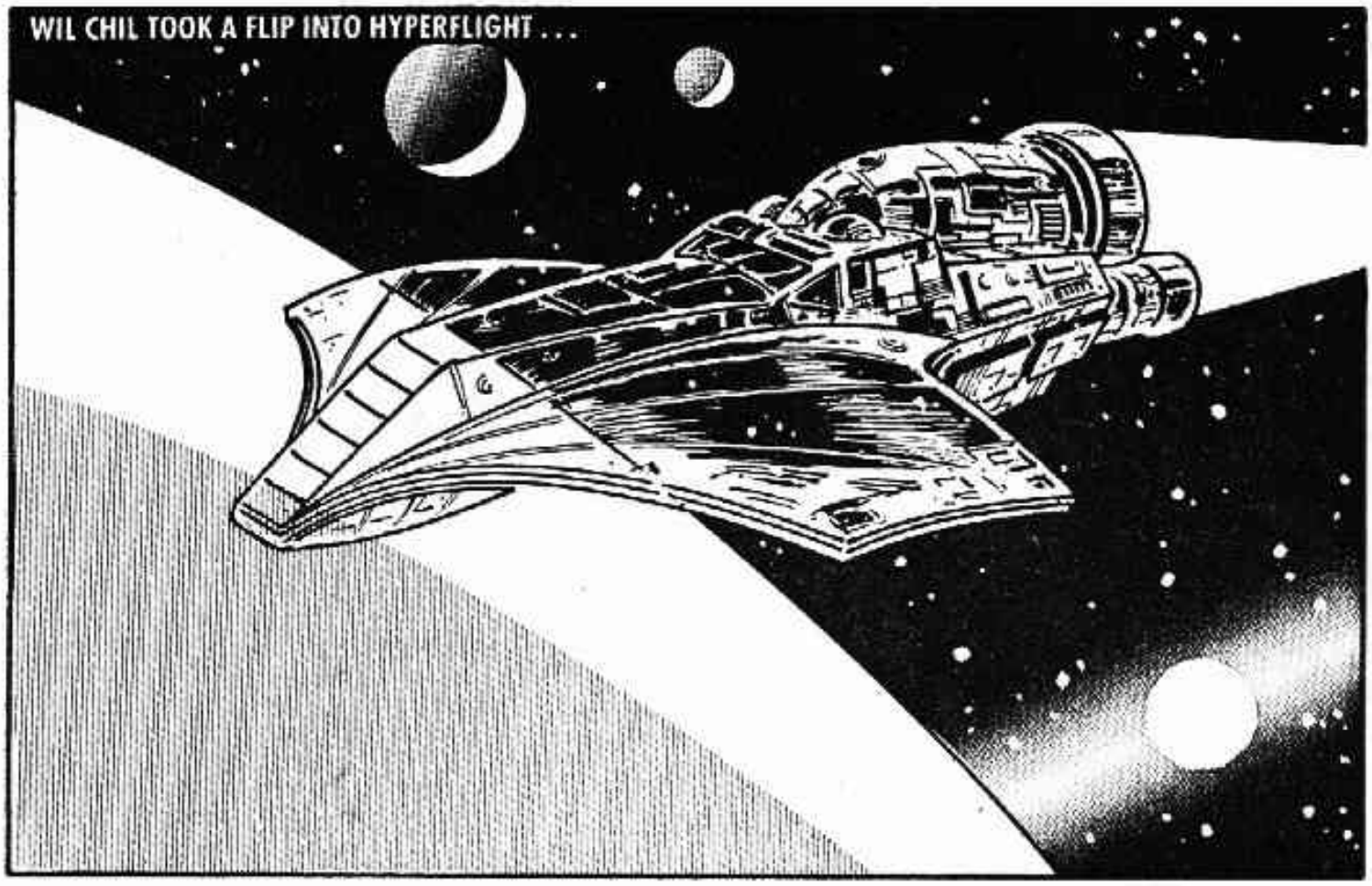
FAREWELL!
WAIT! I DON'T EVEN KNOW YOUR NAME . . . AH, HE'S GONE.

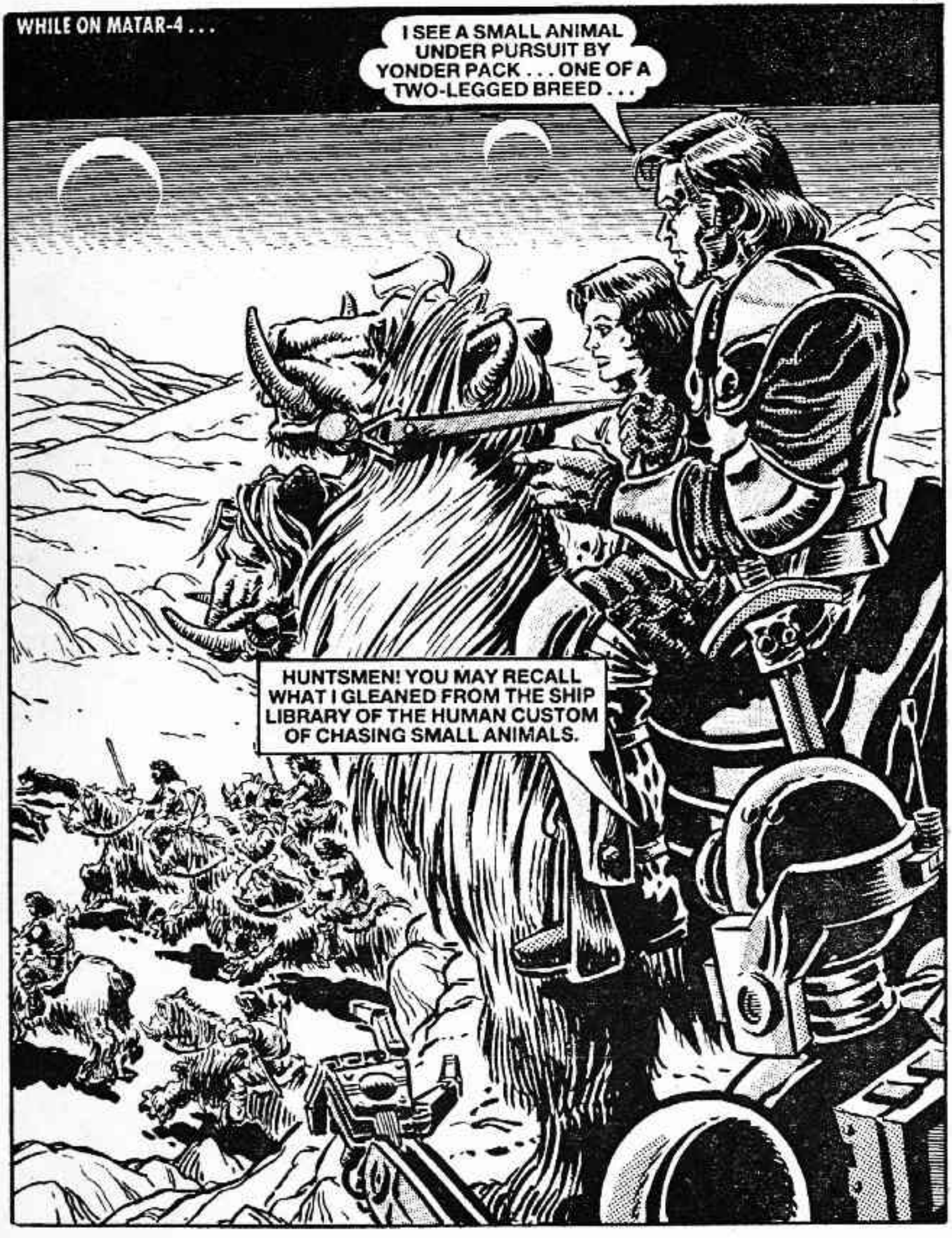
WHAT? NO BLONDE HUSSY?
FEMALE-PERSON, HERE HAVE BEEN TERRIBLE DOINGS WHICH I SHALL RELATE AS WE JOURNEY.

HE MOVES INTO A SCENARIO DEVISED TO GIVE ME CONTROL OF HIM AND THUS OF HIS PLANETARY INHERITANCE, FOLLOWING WHICH MATAR-4 BECOMES THE PROPERTY OF ZODIACAL ENTERPRISES . . .

THE RECORDING ENDS. NOW I MUST LEAVE YOU TO PLAY MY PART IN THE MAIN PERFORMANCE.
GENTLEMEN, I AM SURE A VOTE OF THANKS WOULD NOT BE AMISS FOR WHAT WIL CHIL IS DOING FOR THE BENEFIT OF ZODIACAL ENTERPRISES.

MISTER CHAIRMAN, IS THERE NOT A RISK OF THAT FELLOW BECOMING A LITTLE TOO POWERFUL IN THE COMPANY IF HE GAINS CONTROL OF MATAR-4?
MY OWN THOUGHT EXACTLY — WHICH IS WHY CERTAIN PRECAUTIONS WILL BE TAKEN AGAINST WIL CHIL.


WIL CHIL TOOK A FLIP INTO HYPERFLIGHT . . .


WHILE ON MATAR-4 . . .
I SEE A SMALL ANIMAL UNDER PURSUIT BY YONDER PACK . . . ONE OF A TWO-LEGGED BREED . . .
HUNTSMEN! YOU MAY RECALL WHAT I GLEANED FROM THE SHIP LIBRARY OF THE HUMAN CUSTOM OF CHASING SMALL ANIMALS.

BUT THE QUARRY IS HUMAN! METHINKS I MUST INTERVENE.
BACK, I SAY! MAN IS NO PROPER PREY FOR YOU.
A FOOL AND A STRANGER! TAKE HIM, HOUNDS OF SHUSHAL.

THE BEASTS ATTACKED . . .
. . . AND MET AN UNEXPECTED CHECK . . .
EH? WHAT IS THIS?

SORCERY!
SO LET US SEE IF IT WORKS AGAINST A BOLT.

ODDBODS! IT HAPPENS AGAIN.

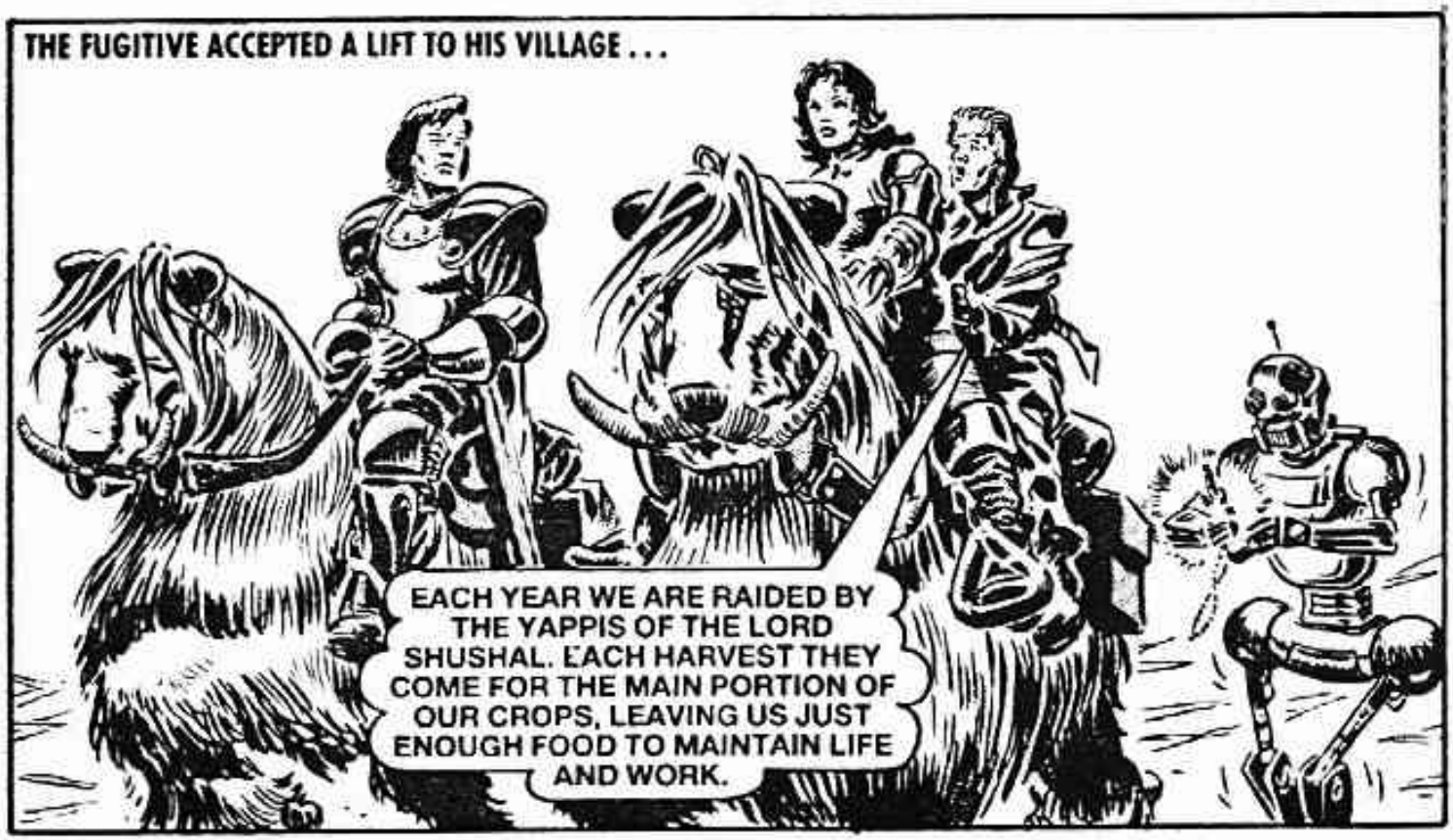
SHUSHAL MUST BE TOLD OF THIS WIZARDRY.

LORD, I MUST HURRY TO MY VILLAGE — AND YOU SHOULD FLEE LEST EVEN YOUR MAGIC DOES NOT SAVE YOU FROM THE POWER OF THE YAPPIS, THE RAIDERS OF THE BLACK CRAG.
MY ONLY MAGIC IS A STRONG ARM AND A STOUT BLADE.

ILANA MOVED QUICKLY . . .
GREAT LORD, WITH RESPECT — TAKE THAT!
HUH!

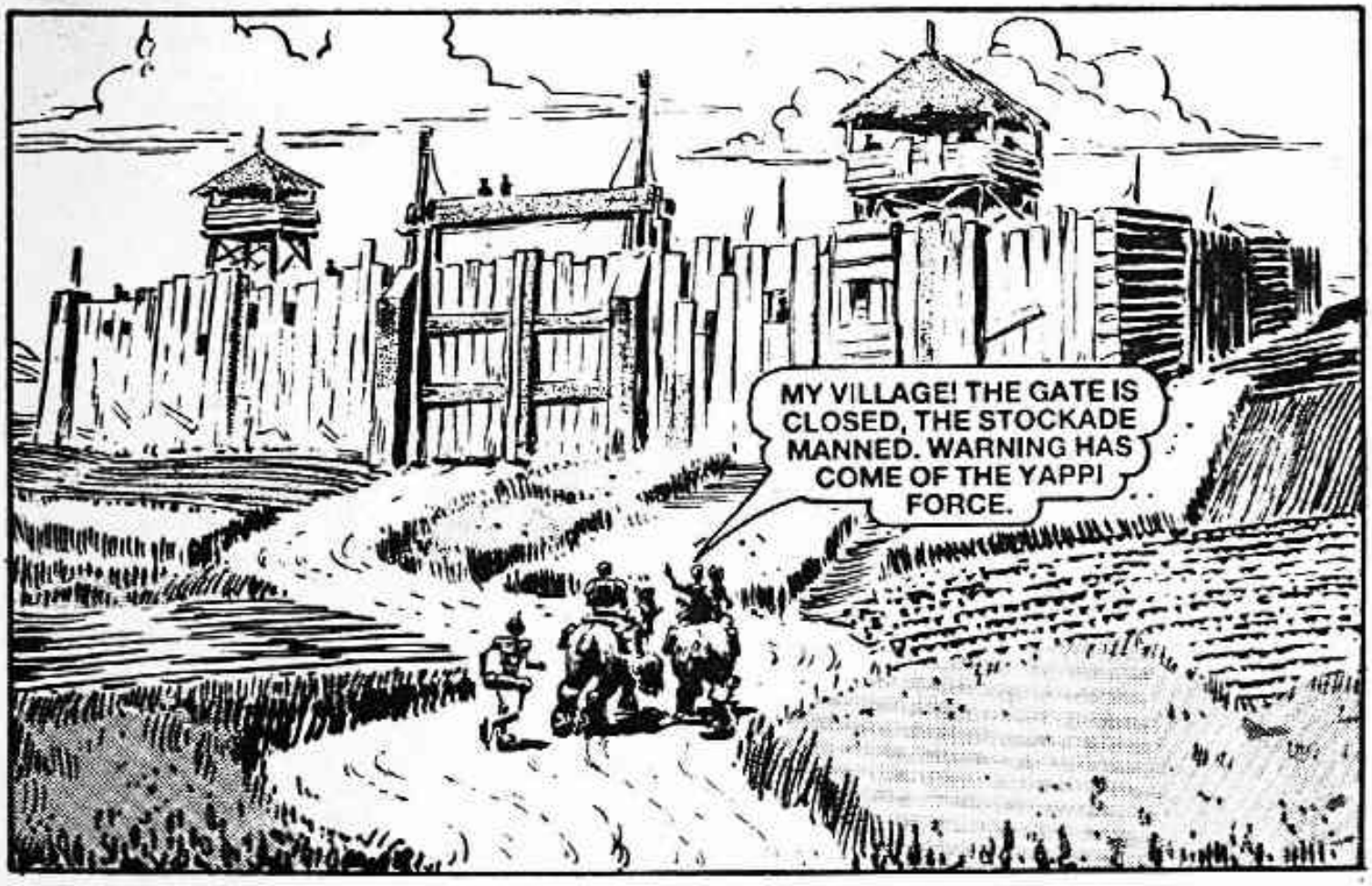
ILANA'S BLOW WAS REPULSED—
HAH! NO MAGIC, EH!

NOW I UNDERSTAND. I WAS FORGETTING THE POWER OF THE PROTECTION GIVEN ME BY THE WIZARD.
PERMIT ME TO EXAMINE THAT AMULET.


THE FUGITIVE ACCEPTED A LIFT TO HIS VILLAGE . . .
EACH YEAR WE ARE RAIDED BY THE YAPPIS OF THE LORD SHUSHAL. EACH HARVEST THEY COME FOR THE MAIN PORTION OF OUR CROPS, LEAVING US JUST ENOUGH FOOD TO MAINTAIN LIFE AND WORK.

EURK-KLOK!

YOUR PROTECTION IS A SMALL ENERGY FIELD ACTIVATED BY ANY MOVEMENT OF VIOLENCE AGAINST YOU. THERE WERE LARGER, CRUDER TYPES ON THE OLD SHIP TO WARD OFF METEORS.
SCIENTIFIC MAGIC! MY WIZARD IS CLEVER!

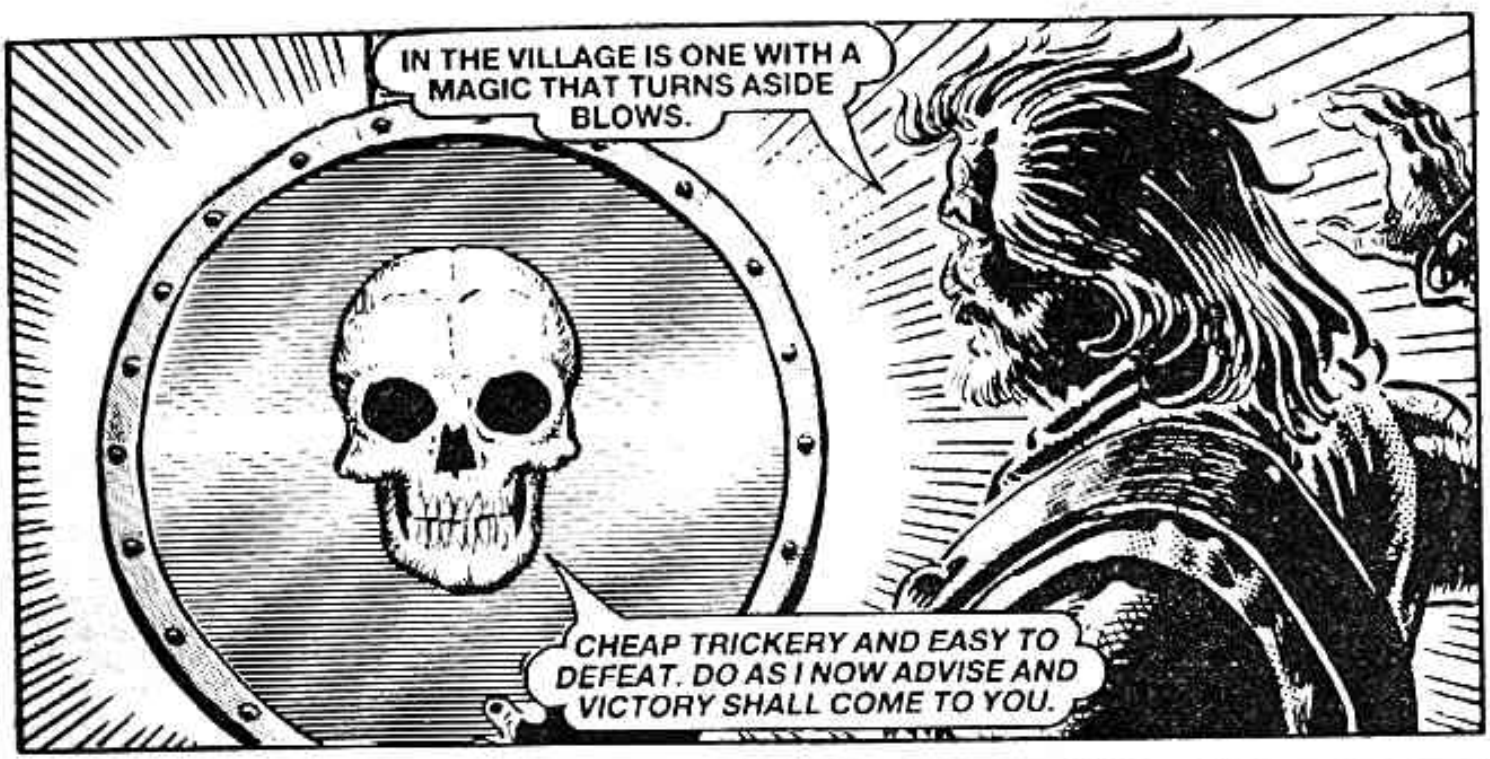

MY VILLAGE! THE GATE IS CLOSED, THE STOCKADE MANNED. WARNING HAS COME OF THE YAPPI FORCE.

YAPPI FIRE-BALL! THEY ARE HERE.
GREAT SHUSHAL, EVEN NOW WE COULD REACH THEM WITH A SWIFT CHARGE.
NO! THERE SHALL BE NO CONTACT TILL WE HAVE PROTECTION AGAINST THE SORCERY REPORTED TO ME.

OPEN — HURRY!
BEHIND SUCH A STOCKADE EVEN PEASANTS CAN PUT UP A STOUT DEFENCE.
WHICH THESE WILL NOT FOR FEAR OF ANGERING SHUSHAL. A TOKEN RESISTANCE WILL BE FOLLOWED BY HUMBLE SURRENDER.
IT IS YOU, GREAT WIZARD!
YES, LORD SOLO. WE MEET AGAIN.

SIEGE CAMP WAS SET UP BY THE YAPPI HORDE . . .
MESSAGE FOR BOSS SHUSHAL.
HE MAY NOT BE DISTURBED WHILE HE CONSULTS HIS FAMILIAR FROM BEYONE THE TOMB.

COME TO ME, GREAT BEING. I BEG YOU COME TO ME.
WHAT IS IT YOU WANT WITH ME?


IN THE VILLAGE IS ONE WITH A MAGIC THAT TURNS ASIDE BLOWS.
CHEAP TRICKERY AND EASY TO DEFEAT. DO AS I NOW ADVISE AND VICTORY SHALL COME TO YOU.

A HERALD APPROACHED THE VILLAGE . . .
HEAR ME, YOU SCUM! IN HIS GENEROSITY THE BOSS SHUSHAL DECREES THIS ISSUE BE SETTLED BY SINGLE COMBAT. HE OFFERS TO LEAVE YOU IN PEACE SHOULD A CHAMPION FROM AMONG YOU DEFEAT THE CHAMPION HE APPOINTS.

LORD SOLO WE BEG YOU TO BE OUR CHAMPION.
A SENSIBLE CHOICE, GOOD PEASANT. I AGREE.
IT MAY NOT BE. LORD SOLO IS A GREAT WARRIOR, BUT BY THE CODE OF CHIVALRY ONLY A TRUE KNIGHT MAY BE CHOSEN AS CHAMPION.
YES — *KLOK* — I REMEMBER FROM THE LIBRARY. MAKING OF KNIGHTS BY MYSTIC RITUAL AND A GIVING OF METAL SPOKES TO FIT ON FOOT COVERINGS.
NO KNIGHT! NOT AFTER ALL THOSE YEARS OF TRAINING IN CHIVALRY AS THE OLD TELURIAN QUEST LUMBERED SUBLIGHT THROUGH THE VOID
MY BOY, YOU HAVE EARNED YOUR SPURS. I MYSELF AS A PRINCE OF WIZARDS SHALL DUB YOU KNIGHT — AFTER YOU HAVE SPENT THE CUSTOMARY VIGIL OVER YOUR ARMS, OF COURSE.

I MUST STAY AWAKE AND THINK NOBLE THOUGHTS . . .

YET ALREADY I FEEL SLEEPY.

SO VERY SLEEPY . . .

HE'S UNCONSCIOUS. MEGRIN, ARE YOU SURE SUCH A SMALL PATCH OF SKIN WILL BE ADEQUATE!
WIL CHIL. EVERY SINGLE CELL CONTAINS THE GENETIC BLUEPRINT THAT ENABLES COMPLETE DUPLICATION OF THE BODY FROM WHICH IT CAME.

WE START BY CHANGING THE AMULETS. POOR YOUNG FELLOW, HIS FIRST BATTLE AS A CHAMPION MUST BE HIS LAST.

SOLO AWOKE NEXT MORNING—
IT IS TIME! THE HOSTILE CHAMPION IS BEFORE THE STOCKADE.

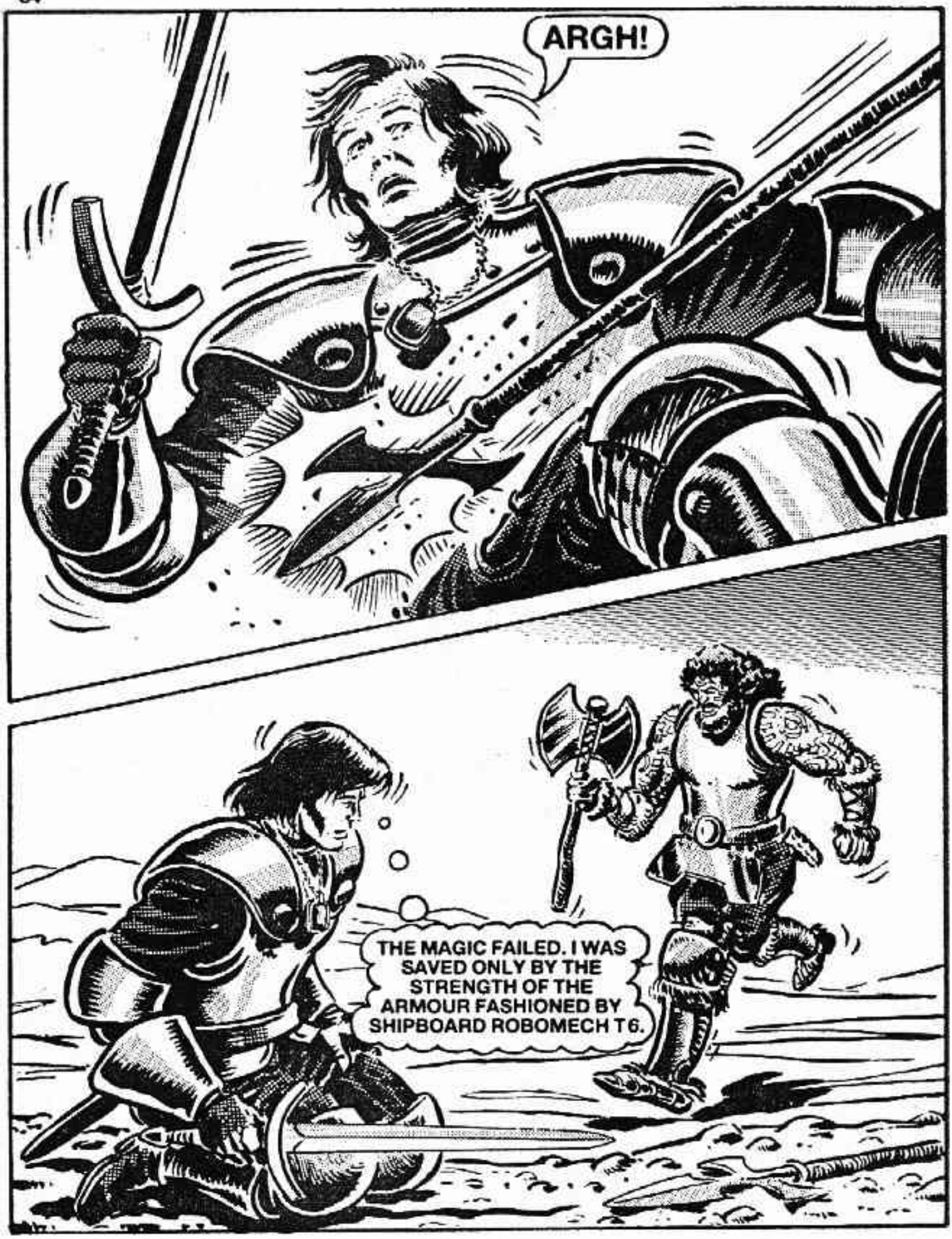
COME OUT, PUNY ONE. FACE ME AND MEET YOUR FINISH.

OH, DEAR! WHAT POWER!

ARISE, SIR SOLO. I SHALL LAY ON THE GOLDEN SPURS LATER, BUT NOW I SUGGEST YOU GO OUT AND MAKE LIKE A CHAMPION.

WHAT MANNER OF KNIGHT IS IT THAT I MUST OPPOSE?
I WOULD SAY HE IS LARGE. YES, DEFINITELY LARGE.

HE ALSO CASTS A FAIR LANCE.
PRITHEE, FAIR SIR. MAKE READY TO DEFEND YOURSELF.
SO THAT IS THE PUP OF THE STRANGE POWER. WELL, I'VE YET TO SEE THE MAGIC THAT CAN TURN MY SPEAR.
THE SPEAR FLEW . . .
NOT EVEN WORTH DEFLECTING WITH MY SWORD WHEN I HAVE THE PROTECTION OF MY WIZARD'S AMULET.

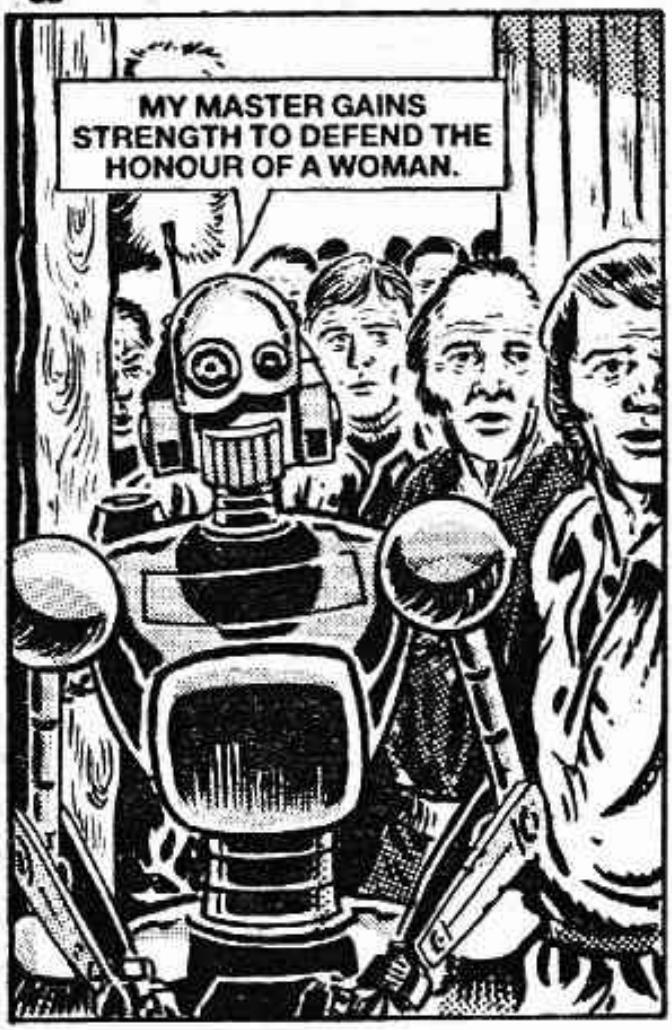

ARGH!
THE MAGIC FAILED. I WAS SAVED ONLY BY THE STRENGTH OF THE ARMOUR FASHIONED BY SHIPBOARD ROBOMECH T6.

PERISH, BRAT.
TRULY THIS IS NO GENTLE KNIGHT.
MAGIC, MEGRIN— JUST MAGIC.
SO THE BOY WILL DIE! HOW WILL YOU EXPLAIN THE RESURRECTION THAT BRINGS HIM BACK TO LIFE?
I AM IMPRESSED BY THE SPEED OF YOUR BIOLOGICAL MOULDING.
THE EASY PART! THE MENTAL CONDITIONING IS WHAT WILL TAKE TIME.

THE BOY IS DISARMED. IT WILL BE SOON OVER. THE YAPPI IS A GREAT WARRIOR.
WHAT IS THAT GIRL UP TO?

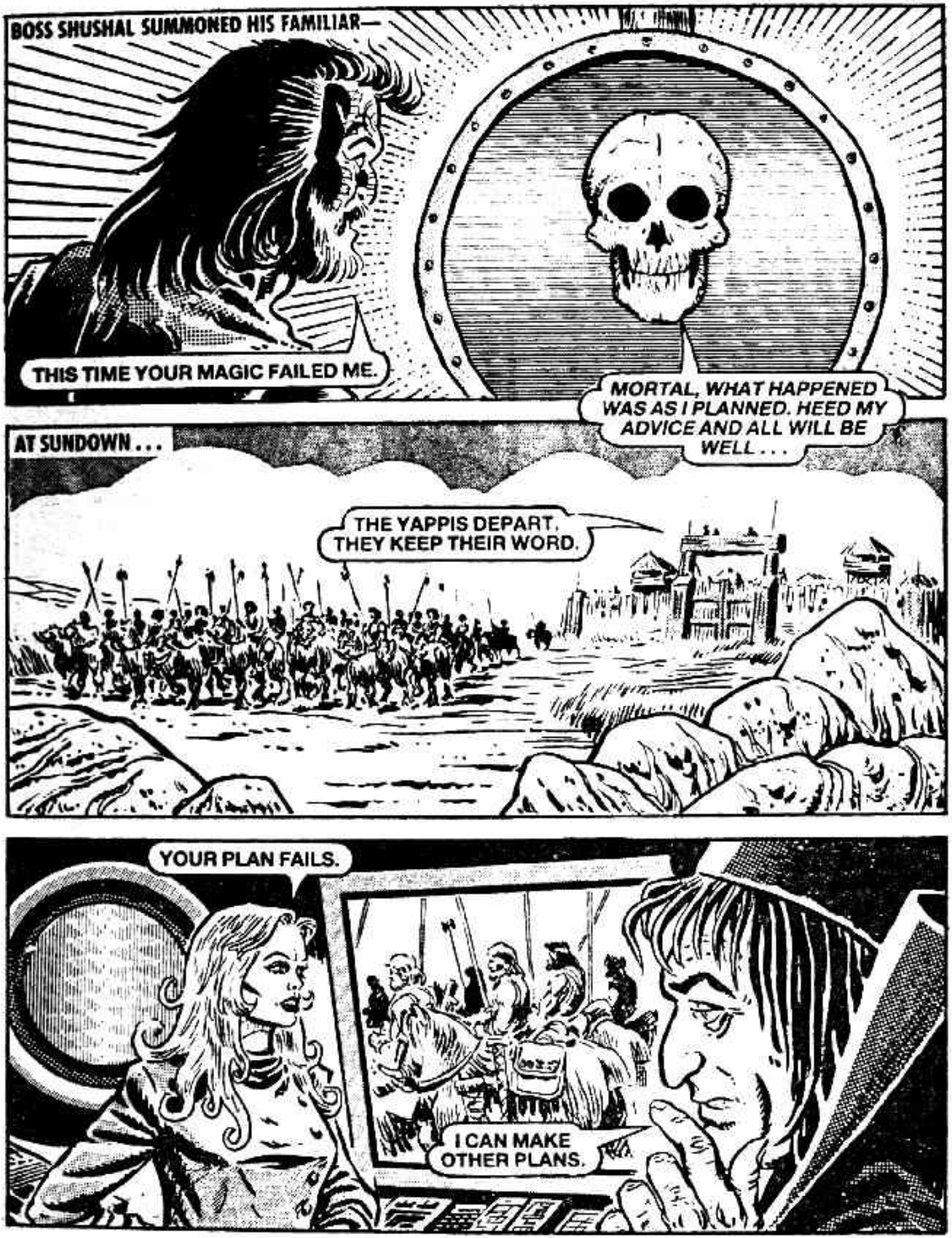
ILANA ATTACKED . . .
I'LL SHOW YOU I'M GOOD FOR MORE THAN JUST COOKING, SIR SOLO.
GOOD KNIGHT, I MUST APOLOGISE FOR THE ILL MANNERS OF THIS FEMALE PERSON.

UNHAND ME, FOUL WENCH!
SIR, LEAVE THE DAMSEL ALONE.


MY MASTER GAINS STRENGTH TO DEFEND THE HONOUR OF A WOMAN.

SIR, DO YOU YIELD?
WHAT ELSE CAN I DO WITH THAT METAL AT MY GULLET?

YOUR CHAMPION IS DEFEATED. NOW KEEP YOUR OATH AND LEAVE.
THIS SHOULD NOT HAVE HAPPENED. I MUST GO TO MY TENT.


BOSS SHUSHAL SUMMONED HIS FAMILIAR—
THIS TIME YOUR MAGIC FAILED ME.
MORTAL, WHAT HAPPENED WAS AS I PLANNED. HEED MY ADVICE AND ALL WILL BE WELL . . .
AT SUNDOWN . . .
THE YAPPIS DEPART. THEY KEEP THEIR WORD.
YOUR PLAN FAILS.
I CAN MAKE OTHER PLANS.

THE VILLAGE CELEBRATED . . .
. . . WITH ONE EXCEPTION . . .
YEEEEEEARRRRGH!

IS HIS WOUND STITCHED?
YES . . . ALAS IT SHALL LEAVE A SCAR!

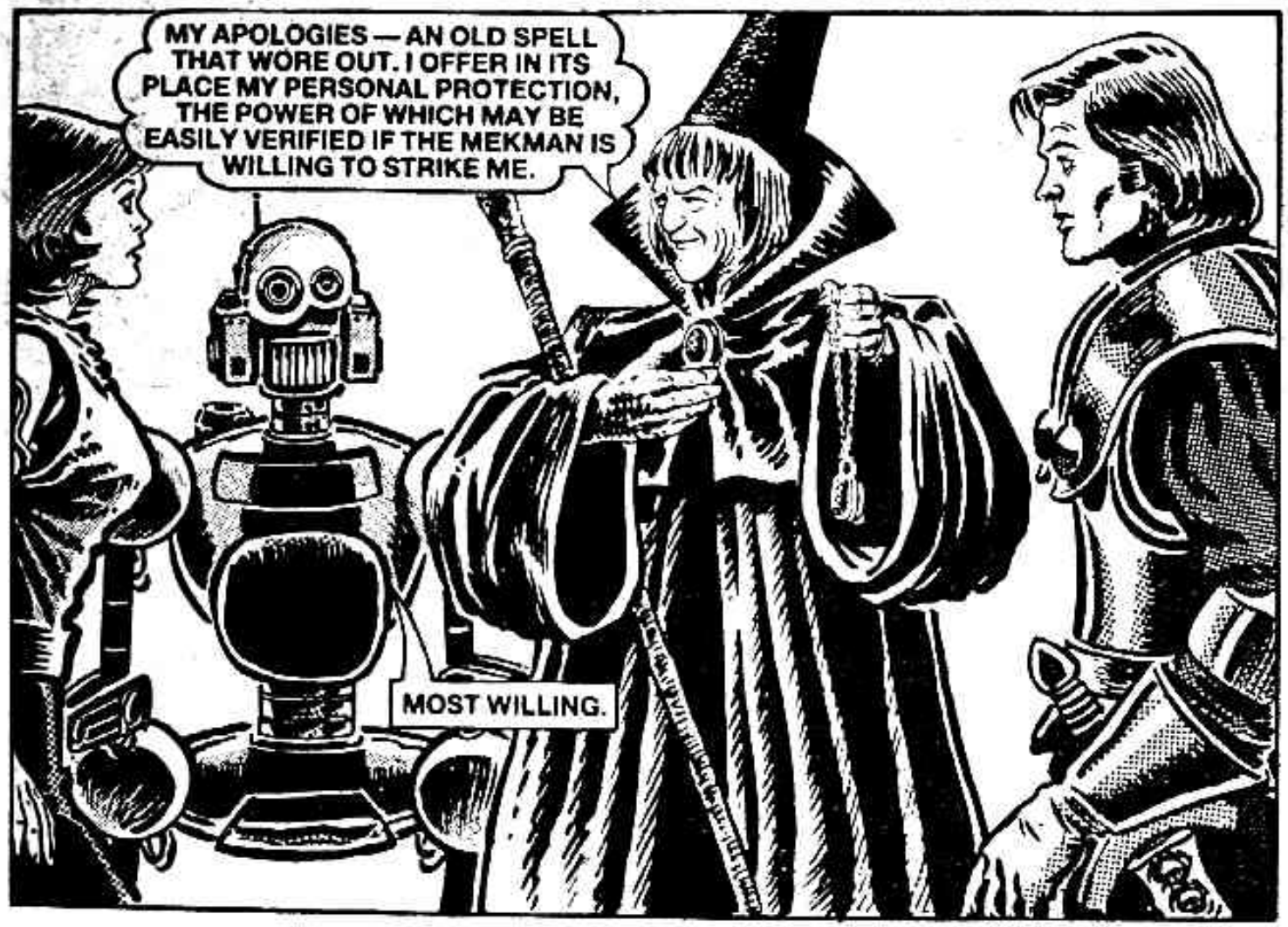
SIR SOLO, YOUR PEOPLE HUMBLY REQUEST SIGHT OF YOU TO PAY THEIR RESPECT.
AH YES, I MUST NOT NEGLECT MY PEOPLE.

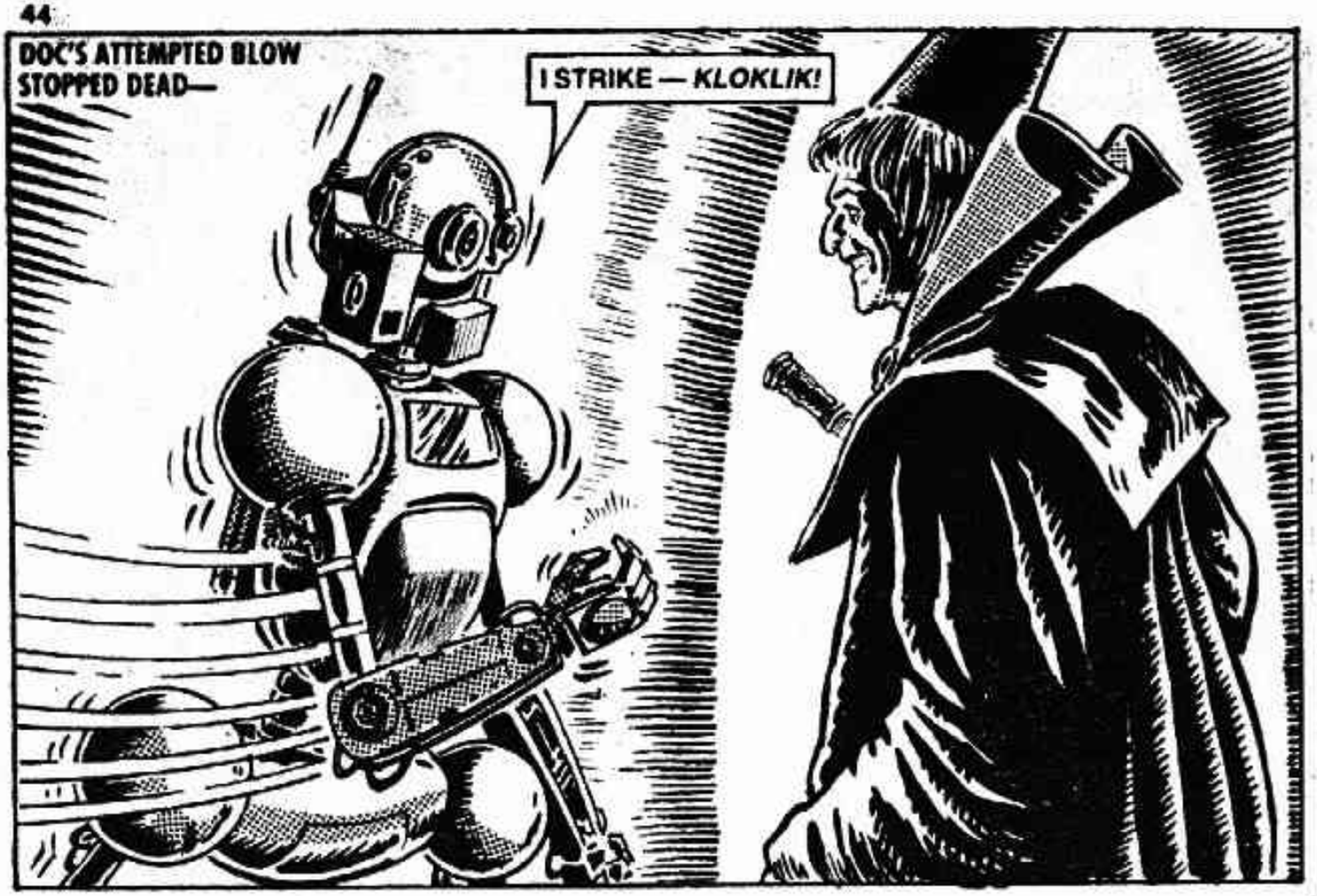
HAIL, SOLO! HAIL THE CHIEF!

THE YAPPI HAVE BEEN REPULSED. NOW IS THE TIME TO DEFEAT THEM. GOOD PEOPLE, YOU SHALL TAKE UP ARMS AND I SHALL LEAD YOU AGAINST THE BLACK CRAG.

WHERE DO THEY GO?
HOMEWARD, SIR SOLO. IT HAS BEEN A LONG DAY AND THERE IS GRINDING OF GRAIN TO BE DONE ON THE MORROW.

WIZARD, I CAN DO WITHOUT HELP THAT FAILS ME AS DID THIS AMULET.
SERFS HAVE NO PLACE IN KNIGHTLY MATTERS, SIR SOLO. IT SHALL BE BY MY HELP THAT YOU DESTROY THE YAPPI HORDE.


MY APOLOGIES — AN OLD SPELL THAT WORE OUT. I OFFER IN ITS PLACE MY PERSONAL PROTECTION, THE POWER OF WHICH MAY BE EASILY VERIFIED IF THE MEKMAN IS WILLING TO STRIKE ME.
MOST WILLING.


DOC'S ATTEMPTED BLOW STOPPED DEAD—
I STRIKE — KLOKLIK!

GO NOW BOLDLY UPON YOUR QUEST, SIR SOLO — TO DEFEAT THE YAPPI PLUNDERERS AND BRING PEACE TO THE PEASANTS OF THIS TROUBLED LAND.
EXACTLY, GREAT WIZARD — ER, YOU DO PUT IT VERY WELL.

SOLO AND HIS COMPANIONS MOVED OUT AT DAWN — UNDER SECRET OBSERVATION . . .
TWO DAYS TO COMPOSE YOUR NEW SCENARIO — ASSUMING OUR HERO DOES NOT GET HIMSELF LOST.
NOT WITH A WIZARD TO GUIDE HIM.

TO THE BLACK CRAG
LOOK! A SIGN!

TWO DAYS LATER . . .
THE BLACK CRAG!
A DISTINCT POSSIBILITY AFTER FOLLOWING ALL THOSE GUIDING ARROWS AND MAGIC SKY-WRITING.
IT'S THAT SOLO CHAP . . . A DASHED NUSIANCE.
KILL THE BASE FELLOW!

A MISSILE OF CHEMICAL COMBUSTION!
OBVIOUSLY INTENDED FOR ME.
SOLO WENT ON AHEAD . . .

BOSS SHUSHAL, ONCE AGAIN YOUR FAMILIAR FAILS US.
HAVE PATIENCE AND SOON YOU SHALL SEE YONDER WHELP DESTROYED.
AS SOLO CLAMBERED TOWARDS THE CASTLE.
A MIST TAKING ON SOLIDITY — WHAT SORCERY IS THIS?

GO BACK, YOUNG FOOL. GO BACK — AND LIVE.
YOU'RE CHANCING YOUR ARM, JIMMY!
THEN PERISH.
AHHH!

MY WIZARD'S POWER SAVED ME. NOW THE CREATURE COMES TO TRY AGAIN.
SOLO MOVED SWIFTLY—

THE SWORD STRUCK HOME AND THE APPARITION ISSUED AN INHUMAN SCREAM AS IT FADED.
TAKE THAT!
YOUR FAMILIAR IS DESTROYED, BOSS SHUSHAL — BOSS NO LONGER.
NOT NOW! WAIT! OH, NO — NO!

SO, ONE REIGN ENDED.

. . . AND ANOTHER BEGAN.
SIR SOLO, WE SURRENDER AND PLEAD FOR MERCY.

HITHER, MY LORD.
MY WIZARD! THIS TIME HIS POWER DID NOT FAIL ME.

WE NEED NOT YOUR COMPANIONS. WHAT HAPPENS NOW CONCERNS ONLY OUR TWO SELVES.

FIRST I OPEN A SECRET PLACE IN WHICH YOU SHALL LEARN A GREAT SECRET.
SO! A TOUCH ON THE MOUNTED HEAD OF A KRILKAT AND THE WALL OPENS.

SOLO WALKED INTO A SURPRISE . . .
THIS IS ME!
NAY! YOU ARE ME.
EURGH!
ONE SMALL HYPOSHOT!

A FINAL MENTAL TRANSFER TO BRING YOUR MEMORY UP TO DATE WITH RECENT HAPPENINGS TO YOUR TWIN.
THEN I SHALL BE COMPLETELY HIM — EXCEPT THAT I SHALL BE YOUR FRIEND AND HAPPY TO FOLLOW YOUR ADVICE IN ALL MATTERS.
SOLO'S MEMORY WAS TRANSFERRED —
SOON I WILL CONTROL THE PLANET THROUGH THE CLONE.

ONE STANDARD HOUR LATER . . .
HUZZAH! HUZZAH!

MY PEOPLE! YES, FOR SUCH YOU ARE — MY PEOPLE WHO SHALL BE LED BY ME IN THE PROUD OLD WAYS OF WAR, PILLAGE AND CONQUEST TILL ALL IN THE LAND BECOME THE PEOPLE OF SIR SOLO.

THAT DOES NOT SOUND LIKE THE HUMAN UNIT I REARED ON THE OLD TELURIAN QUEST.
THAT IS BECAUSE IT IS NOT HIM. DOC, LOOK CLOSELY FOR WHAT I FAILED TO SEE WHEN HE PASSED US.

WHAT HAS BECOME OF THE NECKWOUND STITCHED BY ME?
VANISHED . . . NO SCAR TISSUE . . . THERE IS LOGIC IN YOUR SURMISE.

I SAW THE WIZARD TOUCH THIS KRILKAT HEAD, THEN —
A HIDDEN DOOR OPENS.

THE DAMSEL OF THE TOWER.
LEAVE HIM ALONE — HE IS MINE!
THE SCAR! THIS IS THE REAL SOLO.
AS IF THERE COULD BE ANY DOUBT. NOW FREE ME FROM THIS CONTRAPTION.

THEN THERE WERE TWO . . .

FALSE WIZARD!
KILL HIM!

MUST THIS BECOME A KILLING?
YOU HEARD ME GIVEN MY ORDERS, BROTHER. I KNOW NOT WHY, BUT I MUST OBEY.

STAY, WIZARD. ENJOY WHAT YOU HAVE STARTED.

YOU SHALL FALL TO MY BLADE!

BUT WHICH ONE?
ONE PERISHES!
THE SCAR! HE HAS THE SCAR.

NOW YOU, FALSE WIZARD.
WAIT, BOY — DON'T BE HASTY. DON'T YOU WANT TO KNOW WHO SENT ME HERE?

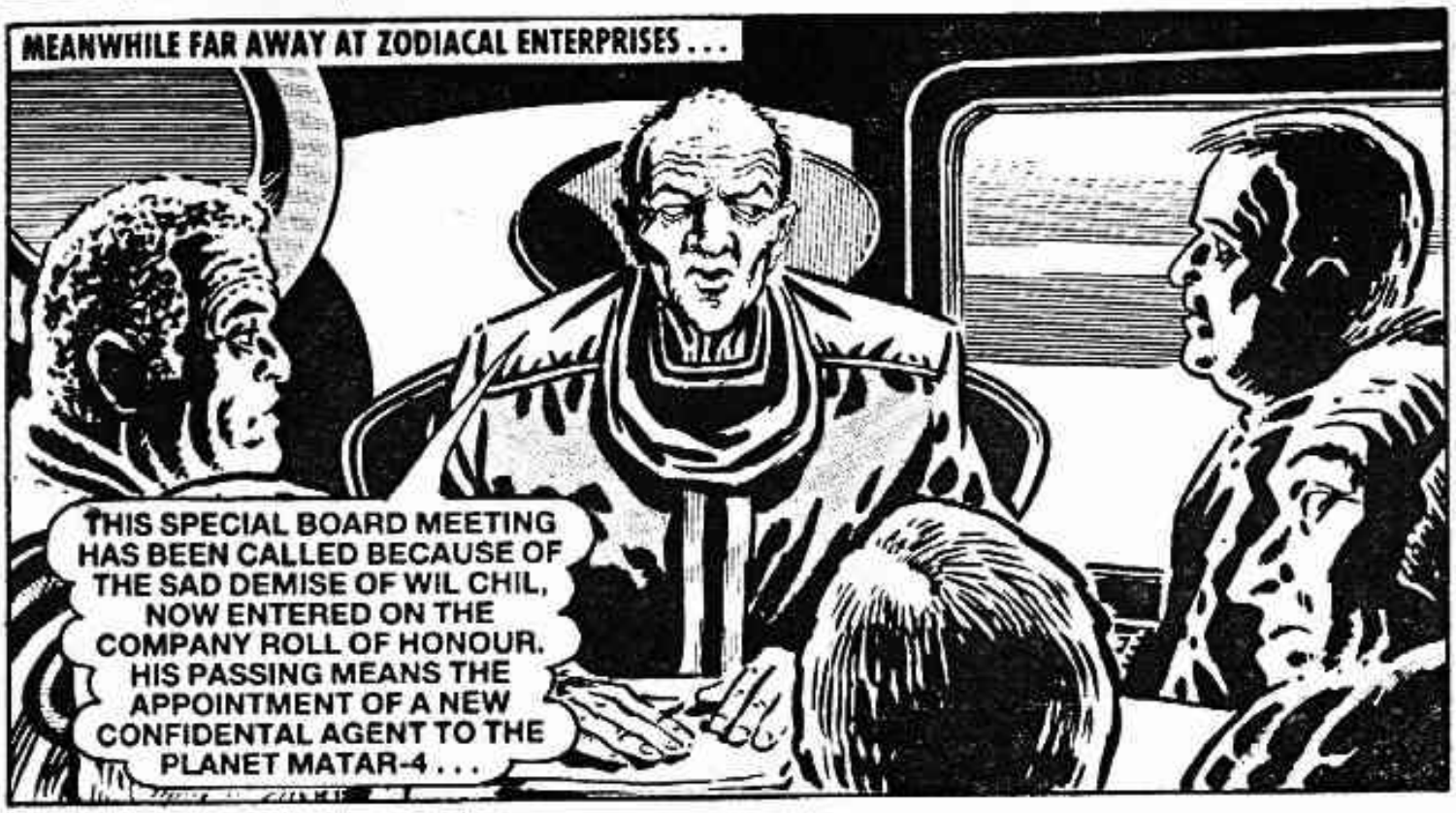
ARGH!
WHAT SORCERY IS THIS?

THE DAMSEL!

I CANNOT RAISE HAND AGAINST EVEN SUCH A FOUL MAID AS THIS.
I CAN!
ILANA'S KNIFE PASSED THROUGH EMPTY SPACE . . .
ODDSBLUD! SHE FADES AWAY.

FAREWELL, SIR SOLO. WE SHALL MEET AGAIN.

THEN WERE WAS NONE.
FORGET WHAT YOU WERE TOLD BY HE WHO LOOKED LIKE ME. RAIDING IS ENDED AND YOU SHALL PEACEFULLY FARM THE LAND.


MEANWHILE FAR AWAY AT ZODIACAL ENTERPRISES . . .
THIS SPECIAL BOARD MEETING HAS BEEN CALLED BECAUSE OF THE SAD DEMISE OF WIL CHIL, NOW ENTERED ON THE COMPANY ROLL OF HONOUR. HIS PASSING MEANS THE APPOINTMENT OF A NEW CONFIDENTAL AGENT TO THE PLANET MATAR-4 . . .

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SOLO'S QUEST

Solo had spent five hundred years in a malfunctioning colony ship cared for by an incompetent robot. When he arrived at his destination, colonists who'd left after him had arrived before him . . . confused? Not half as confused as Solo who then discovered all the lands on the planet belonged to him. At least, that's what the deeds said. Trouble was, the lands had now been claimed by others. Solo was determined to regain what was rightfully his, but those others would rather see him dead first . . .

A SEQUEL TO

LORD of the FAR PLANET